

COMBINATION FOOD SERVICE TAKE-OUT CONTAINER AND NAPKIN DISPENSER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to the food service industry, in particular, to the use of take-out containers, such as bags, and the inclusion of napkins with the take-out containers.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

People who drive up to drive-up windows or approach counters to receive food take-out orders inevitably end up with six to ten napkins stuffed inside the container, or none at all. Sometimes stuffing the napkins inside the container, particularly when the container is a bag and the contents include relatively greasy food such as french fries, allows the napkins to soak up the moisture and grease inside the bag. The use of napkins which have already been moistened or or partially soaked with grease from the contents of the container, can be aggravating.

Certainly receiving the food with no napkins is just as aggravating. Receiving too many napkins is not cost effective for the food vendor and certainly not environmentally friendly due to the extra unnecessary waste created in paper products.

The rule of thumb in the food industry is one napkin per food item. So if the bag contains a hamburger and a container of french fries, then two napkins would be appropriate. However, in most food service containers, there are usually no more than about three items in a bag. Therefore, three napkins may be appropriate in this case. However, 6-10 napkins is overkill and wasteful and no napkins or just one is aggravating. For example, the inventor herein recently went to a nationwide chain fast food drive-up window and ordered 2 items. The attendant

stuffed eight napkins inside the bag, when two is the accepted rule of thumb in the food industry. Unfortunately, the attendant or clerk must grab the napkins and it is often too time consuming to try to separate the napkins and to count the proper number of napkins that should be dispensed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a combination food service take-out container and napkin dispenser. Generally, it is a container for inserting food items to be purchased from a take-out food vendor, in combination with a sleeve attached to an exterior surface of the container. The sleeve serves as means for holding a predetermined number of napkins.

Take-out food vendors may be fast-food restaurants, such as the many national franchise chains around the country. Non-fast-food restaurants also have take-out options. Many grocery stores now serve prepared sandwiches and pre-cooked chicken parts for take out by customers. Convenience stores, including gas station chains, include take-out food services, such as sandwiches and pre-cooked chicken parts. Sandwich shops, such as SUBWAY® sandwich stores and BLIMPIE® sandwich stores, are food vendors that could use the invention to render their operations and costs more efficient. These are just examples of the many businesses that could use the present invention to reduce cost, be more efficient, and minimize paper waste from an environmental viewpoint.

A predetermined number of napkins could be inserted in the sleeve based on the expected food items that a merchant typically expects to place in a certain size container. For example, if a fast-food vendor expects that on the average, three items may be placed in a medium size bag, then that merchant could order medium size bags with three pre-packaged napkins inserted in the

sleeve. For a smaller bag, maybe the predetermined number of napkins corresponding to a predetermined number of food items typically anticipated to be inserted in said container, is two. The vendor should be able to specify how many napkins for each size container that may be desirable. Otherwise, the container manufacturer might have pre-set number of napkins for each size container, bag or box, based on a food industry-wide average. In any event, it is anticipated that the number of napkins selected would reasonably correspond to an expected need, while minimizing waste, that is, not overly stuffing the sleeve with unnecessary napkins.

The container may be a paper product, such as a paper bag, a cardboard box like those used in KFC® restaurant chains or a foam take-out container as used in many restaurants. The container may also be a plastic product such as the plastic bags or boxes used in many sandwich shops. When paper bags or plastic bags are shaped as a sleeve or cylindrically-shaped, the sleeve holding the napkins would typically be located on an exterior side surface of the sleeve-shaped bag.

The sleeve has at least one open end through which ends of the napkins to be inserted may extend outside the sleeve for facilitating the pulling of the napkins from the sleeve for use. For example, although one open end should suffice, opposite open ends may be more practical from a manufacturing standpoint and cost of manufacture. The sleeve may also be effectively closed off on all four edges and instead have an intermediate slit portion (like those in tissue boxes) through which the napkins can be pulled out for use. The sleeve may be attached to a bottom of the container, to a surface of one of the sides of the container, or when the bag is sleeve-shaped as discussed above, then the sleeve holding the napkins would be located on the surface of the elongated sleeve-shaped bag, paper or plastic. The sleeve itself can be made from

paper material, plastic material, cardboard material or foam material, as applicable to be compatible with the material from which the container is made. If the container is a foam or plastic product for example, a paper sleeve could be applied to a surface of the container or the sleeve could be formed from foam and its edges that are closed off would be integrally formed with the foam container surface.

An area along non-open ends or edges of the sleeve is adhesively attached to the container or may be integrally formed as when plastic or foam containers are used. When adhesive is used, a sufficient amount of overlap is allowed to account for the number of napkins to be stored with the container, yet further to allow for sufficient bonding or gluing surface of the sleeve to the container. The actual dimensions and surface area to be bonded together can vary depending on the size of the actual napkins used and the size and shape of the container used.

In some cases as mentioned above, where plastic based material is used for the container, the closed ends or edges may be integrally sealed to the container. Typically, in the plastic industry, such polymeric material is capable of being heat sealed, thereby minimizing the bonding area needed to possibly less than a 1/8 inch heat-seal line. If foam containers are used, the sleeve can be formed as part of the molding process and effectively, only the edges of the sleeve portion need be integrally formed, which again will be in the range of the typical thickness of the foam container.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings:

Fig. 1 is a conceptual representation of one embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 2 is a conceptual representation of another embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 3 is a conceptual representation of a third embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 4 is a conceptual representation of a fourth embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 5 is a conceptual representation of a fifth embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 6 is a conceptual representation of a sixth embodiment of the invention where three sides of the sleeve are closed off and the napkins extend out one open end;

Fig. 7 is a conceptual representation of a seventh embodiment of the invention where all four sides are closed off and the napkins (not shown) would be accessible through an intermediate slit portion; and

Fig. 8 is a conceptual representation of an eighth embodiment of the invention where a foam or plastic take-out container is depicted and a sleeve for the napkins is formed with the depending edges of the sleeve are attached integrally with the foam or plastic of the surface of the container.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to the drawings, Figs. 1-8 disclose several conceptual embodiments of the present invention, which is a combination food service take-out container and napkin dispenser, depicted generally as 10. Although specific embodiments may be shown on individual drawings, it is understood that features of each depicted embodiment could be combined to form additional embodiments understood by the totality of the drawings as a whole and as understood by the scope of the claims appended hereto.

Generally, it is a container 12 for inserting food items to be purchased from a take-out food vendor, in combination with a sleeve 14 attached to a portion of the container 12. The sleeve 14 serves as means for holding a predetermined number of napkins 16.

A predetermined number of napkins 16 could be inserted in the sleeve 14 based on the expected food items that a merchant typically expects to place in a certain size container 12 (bag 12a in Figs. 1, 2, 4 and 5, or box 12b in Fig. 3). For example, if a fast-food vendor or the restaurant industry expects that on the average, three items may be placed in a medium size bag 12a, then that merchant could order medium size bags 12a with three pre-packaged napkins 16 inserted in the sleeve 14. For a smaller bag 12a, maybe the predetermined number of napkins 16 corresponding to a predetermined number of food items typically anticipated to be inserted in said container 12 is two. The vendor should be able to specify how many napkins 16 for each size container 12 that may be desirable. Otherwise, the container manufacturer might have pre-set number of napkins 16 for each size container 12, bag 12a or box 12b, based on a food industry-wide average. In any event, it is anticipated that the number of napkins 16 selected would reasonably correspond to an expected need, while minimizing waste, that is, not overly stuffing the sleeve 14 with unnecessary napkins 16.

The container 12 may be a paper product, such as a paper bag 12a, or a cardboard, plastic or foam box 12b, like those used in KFC® restaurant chains and most restaurants. The container 12 may also be a plastic product such as the plastic bags 12a or plastic boxes used in many sandwich shops. Typically, these bags 12a would be cylindrically-shaped such as that depicted in Fig. 5. In this case, that is, when containers 12, particularly paper or plastic bags 12a, are shaped

as a sleeve or are cylindrically-shaped, the sleeve 14 holding the napkins 16 would typically be located on a surface 12c of the elongated or sleeve-shaped bag 12a.

The sleeve 14 has at least one open end or edge 14a through which ends of the napkins 16 to be inserted may extend outside the sleeve 14 for facilitating the pulling of the napkins 16 from the sleeve 14 for use. Two opposing ends 14a may be the most economical option; however, one open end is also contemplated by the present invention. Alternatively, all the edges may be closed and an intermediate slit portion 18, as conceptually shown in Fig. 7, may be incorporated into the sleeve 14. This slit portion 18 is similar to that typically used in tissue boxes. The sleeve 14 may be attached to a bottom 12d of the container in such a way that the napkins 16 will be in a face to face relationship with the bottom 12d. In this case, the bonded area discussed below may be on the bottom 12d or may be on the sides of the container 12. The sleeve 14 may be attached to a surface of one of the sides 12e of the container 12 in such a way that the napkins 16 will be in a face to face relationship with a surface of one of the sides 12e of the container 12. Also, when the bag is sleeve-shaped as discussed above, then the sleeve 14 holding the napkins 16 would be attached on the surface 12c of the elongated sleeve-shaped bag 12a, paper or plastic, in such a way that the napkins 16 will be in a face to face relationship with the surface 12c of the elongated sleeve-shaped bag 12a. Again, in each case, the bonded area discussed below may extend or be located on an adjacent surface, or partially on the same surface with which the napkins 16 are in a face to face relationship and an adjacent surface, or both. In the latter case, one bonded side of the sleeve 14 may be fully bonded on the same surface of the napkins 16, and the opposite bonded side may be bonded to an adjacent surface or partially on both the adjacent surface and the same side as the napkins 16.

As alluded to above, an area comprising the closed ends 14b of the sleeve 14 may be adhesively attached to the container 12. However, a sufficient amount of overlap is allowed to account for the number of napkins 16 to be stored with the container 12, yet further to allow for sufficient bonding or gluing surface of the sleeve 14 to the container 12. For example, an area of about 1/4 inch to 1/2 inch in width by generally the overall width of the sleeve 14 may be coated with an adhesive so as to bond the ends 14b of the sleeve 14 to the container 12. This will form the sleeve 14 or pouch area through which, the napkins 16 may be inserted or held in place until pulled for use. So if a folded napkin is about 3 1/2 inches wide and about 7 inches long, then the sleeve 14 might be as narrow as about 1 inch wide to about 6 inches wide and the length of the sleeve 14, glued edge to glued edge, might be about 4 3/4 inches long to allow for volumetric depth of the stored napkins and proper amount of glued surface or bonding area to adhere to the container surface. The actual dimensions and surface area to be bonded together can vary depending on the size of the actual napkins 16 used and the size and shape of the container 12 used.

In some cases, where plastic based material or foam based material is used for the container 12, an area or edges at the closed ends 14b of the sleeve 14 may be integrally sealed or formed to the container 12, as shown in the conceptual representation of Fig. 8. Typically, in the plastic industry, such polymeric material is capable of being heat sealed, thereby minimizing the bonding area needed to possibly less than a 1/8 inch heat seal line. In the foam industry, the sleeve 14 could be formed as part of the molding process. Of course, when foam is used for the container, the sleeve can still be made from polymeric or paper material as well.

It should be understood that the preceding is merely a detailed description of one or more embodiments of this invention and that numerous changes to the disclosed embodiments can be made in accordance with the disclosure herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. The preceding description, therefore, is not meant to limit the scope of the invention. Rather, the scope of the invention is to be determined only by the appended claims and their equivalents.